Colchester Public Schools - Budget Questions 2022-2023

Budget Workshop - 3/15/2022

1. **At the BOE Meeting, March 8, the superintendent recommended that the reduction of teachers at Bacon Academy be changed from a 5.0 FTE reduction to a 3.0 FTE reduction. What was the reason for this change**?

   In the initial budget discussions earlier in the year, it was decided to reduce 5.0 FTE teaching positions at Bacon Academy due to declining enrollment and due to potential increases in other areas. Since that initial conversation, we have had the opportunity to consider many influences and potential unintended consequences if we cut five positions. We identified that it could compromise the successful implementation of the Capstone Projects as a graduation requirement starting with next year's seniors, which will necessitate the addition of at least six new sections of the half-year Capstone course. In addition to that, we were concerned if we cut 5.0 FTE, it could have deleterious effects on our ability to offer an ample amount of electives across both the Humanities and STEM that students need to graduate. In essence, we could probably make the class sizes fit, but the cut to opportunities for students might be too much based on our graduation requirements. In addition, the significant savings that were realized in the employee related insurance line eliminated the need for the full five positions to be removed.

2. **The Alternative Education program is no longer being offered, either at Bacon Academy or the Old Academy, so how are those students being served?**

   The Alternative Education (Alt. Ed.) program has been an integral part of CPS for many years, serving a population that benefited from the personalized, separate program. Over the last several years, the number of students qualifying for the Alt. Ed. program significantly declined, presumably by a very high graduation rate from Alt. Ed. and the increased focus on varied and responsive interventions and supports that have been built at Bacon Academy. In Spring of 2021 we were forecasting that only 2-3 students were eligible to attend Alt. Ed. for the current school year, and it was determined that staffing a program with six certified teachers for so few students was not a viable program. The students were placed in other programming and we are very happy to report that they are all currently on pace to graduate this year. In fact, one was just offered a full-time career at Electric Boat upon graduation due to their success and the great training they have received in our Technology Education programs. Their success this year can be directly connected to a brand new program we recently started called Brick. The Brick program is a highly individualized student support

program that is currently servicing approximately 20 of our most disenfranchised students. We are seeing immense success thus far, and the Board will hear more about this program at their May Board meeting.

3. **Will Colchester Public Schools continue to use Old Bacon Academy for instructional purposes?**
   The district will continue to evaluate the instructional programming potential for Old Bacon Academy and we look forward to the potential revitalization of the building in the future.

Budget Workshop - 3/22/2022

4. **Curricula - Why does $65K need to be allocated annually for curriculum implementation? Why are the curricula being updated so frequently?**

   The curriculum implementation line funds the one or two curricular areas that undergo revision each year. There are 13 curriculum areas that are taught to our students over the course of a student's 13 years of education, and each area has been placed on a 7-year review cycle to ensure that instruction in that area includes current, relevant, and engaging content. By reviewing one or two curricular areas each year, our educators are afforded the opportunity to update texts, integrate the most current research-based instructional strategies, and align instruction so that student learning builds upon itself year-over-year. In the last 6 years, Colchester has worked to build a foundation of a written curriculum. Prior to 2017, there was little written curriculum for teachers to use as a guide to instruction. Without a written curriculum, a teacher is left to his or her own decisions about what to teach students. Alternatively, when teachers have an engaging written curriculum, students are guaranteed a more consistent quality of instruction, teachers are able to work as a team to support student learning, and instruction is more effectively scaffolded, therefore reducing the likelihood of gaps in learning year-over-year. By 2023/24, the District will have reviewed and/or written curriculum for all 13 areas, thus creating a foundation for teachers to build upon when making instructional decisions.
   Since 2017, the District budget has funded $293,474 of curriculum resources and the ESSERIII (ARPA) grant has funded $25,000 to support the curricular areas of Career Technical Education, Science, Visual Literacy, World Language, Digital Literacy and Innovations, English Language Arts, Health, and Physical Education.

5. **Why does the budget increase when overall enrollment is going down?**

   A number of factors go into the overall budget that are not directly tied to enrollment. These include non-discretionary factors such as employee related insurance, employee benefits, and contractual wage increases. Other factors include those areas that the district has strengthened over the past decade that were in need of adequate funding. These include IT support staff and a long-range technology refresh plan, capital improvements and a long-range capital plan, adequate maintenance repair and supply funding, school safety and security, and appropriate levels of staffing for finance and human resources. An additional factor that changes yearly is the needs of our students with disabilities. The needs of these students vary significantly and the appropriate support is required by federal law. In addition, the district has made a concerted effort to increase its in-district special programming that allows us to keep some students with significant needs in the district rather than making outplacements. However, the district continues to review the budget line-by-line to ensure efficiencies where possible and we reallocate resources to enhance our program while not increasing the overall number of staff. Finally, in terms of overall costs compared to other districts in the state, Colchester PS provides an excellent education while keeping costs low. In 2011-12 based on the Net current expenditures per pupil (NCEP) published by the State, CPS was ranked 153 out of 169 districts and in 2019-20 we were ranked 103 out of 169 districts, or still in the bottom half of all districts.

6. **What are the expenses associated with the CTAC program?**

   The following expenses for the 18-22 year-old program, or CTAC, are listed under the Special Education budget:

Two (2.0) paraprofessionals	$45,992
One (1.0) teacher	$91,451
Cell phone for program	$ 450
Gasoline for van transportation	$ 540
Maintenance for van	$ 250
Part-time custodian	$ 3,393
Rental of facility (shared)	$23,000

7. **The district is working with an outside contractor, NCCJ, to assist with its diversity initiatives. What is the source of that funding?**

   The District is using TITLE IV, PART A: STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT federal grant funds to pay for support from NCCJ.

8. **Why is there a 36.18% increase in classified overtime?**

   The majority of the classified overtime increase of $12,700 is at the district level. This increase is due to additional hours of overtime for the School Resource Officer to attend evening and weekend events and a weekly stipend for the SRO's new service dog.

9. **What changes took place with office professionals?**

   The total number of office professionals remains at 16.25 FTE, but one position was moved from WJJMS to CES due to the drop in enrollment at WJJMS and the significant increase of enrollment at CES.

10. **How has the Special Education budget changed over the past few years?**

    The special education budget varies significantly year to year based on the needs of students. The budget in 2017-18 was $8,365,428, in 2020-21 it was $8,202,113 and the proposed 2022-23 budget is $8,734,723. The most significant adjustments year-over-year are the number of staff required to address student needs in-district and the number of students placed out-of-district. Both of these budget lines can shift significantly, even in one year, as can the total number of identified students. The number of identified students has changed over the past 10 years, from 384 in 2011-12, to a high of 418 in 2017-18, with a current number of 358. One important note is that the district budgets for the total cost of outplaced students and the state provides an excess cost reimbursement of any cost, tuition and/or transportation over 4.5 times our per pupil expenditure. These reimbursement funds go directly to the town, but the district can request these funds to cover any unanticipated costs that occur during the school year. (Please see the FAQ document at the end of the budget for more information.)

11. **Is there savings when a teacher retires or resigns?**

    When a teacher resigns there can be some savings, but only if the replacement teacher is hired at a lower step on the salary scale of the contract.

    When a teacher retires the following contractual conditions apply:

    Certified professional employees who have served a minimum of fifteen (15) years of consecutive service in the system, upon retirement or death, but not resignation, shall receive payment for twenty-seven percent (27%) of all accumulated unused Sick Leave days based on salary at the time of severance. To be eligible for this payment, teachers must have been hired on or before June 30, 2017 and must give written notification by October 1 of intent to retire.

In general, a teacher eligible for retirement is at the top step of the salary scale and if they have the full allowable amount of sick leave, or 180 days, their potential retirement payout offsets any savings even if the district hires a replacement teacher at a lower step. The savings would be in the second year after a teacher retires if there is a difference between their salary at retirement and the salary of the replacement teacher. The purpose of requiring teachers to declare their retirement by October 1st is to allow the district to plan for the retirement benefit in the budget. The estimated retirement cost can be found on page 171 of the 2022-23 proposed budget, "259007 41230 RETIREMENT" and will vary year to year based on the number of qualified certified retirements.

12. **There has been a significant increase in the health insurance reserve, can you explain the background of that increase?**
    The significant increase in the health insurance reserve balance for the BOE has happened over the last couple of years (2019-2020, 2020-2021 and current 2021-2022 through November). The largest driver of the increase is related to actual health insurance claims and associated administrative costs being lower than anticipated for both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 when the budget funding calculations were prepared. As has been discussed over the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in cancellation of medical procedures, and delays in doctor visits, impacting the actual claims incurred. Since March 2020, the balance in the reserve increased from approximately $2,562,000 to $4,007,000 as of the end of November 2021.

    The budget funding formula recommended by Lockton and adopted by the BOF takes into account the reserve fund balance when calculating the employer contribution amount to be included in the budget. Typically, the balance as of the end of November is used for the BOE calculation. The budget calculation for FY 2022-2023 is also being impacted by a significantly lower estimate for incurred claims next year.

13. **What major requests from each of the building administrators did not make it into the proposed budget?**
    No major requests from the departments or schools were not placed into the proposed budget. Some supply line items at WJJMS and BA were adjusted to level funding year-over-year to reflect the declining enrollments.

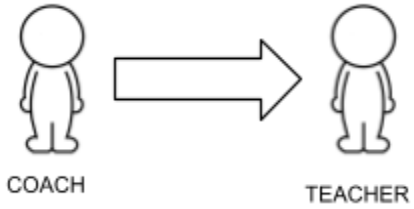
14. **What are the average class sizes K-8 and how has this number changed over the last several years? How does our average compare to schools in our DRG?**
    Class sizes in Kindergarten through grade 5 range from 17 to 21 according to the March 1, 2022 enrollment data. Class sizes at WJJMS range from 18 to 21. The elementary class sizes typically fall into this same range as the district adjusts the number of teachers in each grade to stay at approximately 20 students per class. The class sizes at WJJMS can vary from year to year as the

number of core area teachers remains the same for each team at four. So, the individual class size, in general, is determined by the total number of students in a grade divided by eight, or two teams of four teachers.
Class sizes in other districts are not readily available.

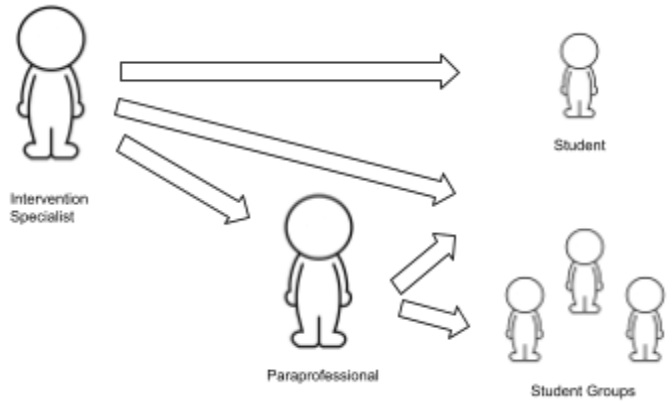
15. What are the largest class sizes at Bacon Academy?
There are currently four classes with 30 students in each, and 16 classes between 25 and 30 students.

16. What is the rationale behind not adding paraprofessionals in Kindergarten? What other districts in our DRG do not have paras in Kindergarten classrooms?
The district has not placed paraprofessionals in kindergarten classrooms as we have determined that targeted intervention and instruction provides a greater impact. Currently, paraprofessionals push into classrooms to help with small group instruction. We have 40 min of reading intervention and 30 min of math intervention push in support daily to provide small groups. Teachers create the lessons and paraprofessionals meet with the small groups. We rotate groups between the teacher and paraprofessional so that teachers work with all students in a small group. Paraprofessionals also help with collecting progress monitoring data as needed and instructed by the teacher.
Information about classroom supports is not readily available from other districts.

17. What is the difference between instructional coaches, interventionists and paraprofessionals?
Coaches - Certified staff who have specialized certifications and/or training in reading or math. Work with teachers to review student learning, co-lesson plan, observe and reflect with the teacher.



Intervention Specialists - certified staff who have specialized certifications and/or training in reading or math. Review whole-school student learning data, identify students with lagging skills, arrange for interventions aimed at meeting student needs, provide interventions or support paraprofessionals to provide interventions to individual students or student groups.



Paraprofessionals - Non-certified staff who fulfill a variety of roles within the district. When assigned to intervention labs, paraprofessionals work directly with students to provide them interventions aimed at addressing specific student skill needs.